AT THE EDGE OF BROKEN-NESS

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

(A message featuring Lay Readers)

Series on the Book of Job, #1

Notes on this Message

This dramatic reading takes place in two seemingly different spheres. The Reader—most likely the pastor—stands behind the pulpit. The Reader needs to read these passages from the Bible, so that the congregation realizes that the scene has shifted back to the story of Job each time.

The other readers—Male 1, Male 2, Female 1, Female 2, and Female 3—are off to the side of the pulpit. They are seated in folding chairs placed in a semi-circle facing the congregation. The arrangement of chairs gives the impression that this is a meeting of a support group. You may even want to put a sign on the wall nearby reading "Survivors Support Group" to make the point crystal-clear.

Male 1, Male 2, Female 1, and Female 3 represent a cross-section of New York society. They may dress however they like.

Female 2 represents a counselor. She leads the support group. In this role, she needs to dress professionally. She also might want to hold a notepad or clipboard, anything that might convey that she is instructing the others.

The only essential props are a telephone log book for Female 1 and a notebook or clipboard for Female 2.

AT THE EDGE OF BROKEN-NESS*

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

We are beginning a series of four messages today on the book of Job. This is not an easy series of messages, but it is an important series that can help us grow as disciples of Jesus, for this series deals with the problem of why good people experience pain and suffering.

The problem of evil is eternal, spanning all times, races, cultures, and classes. And no one embodies the question of why bad things happen to good people more than does Job.

Now I realize than not everyone wants to deal with heavy questions about why there is suffering in the world. Even thinking about the subject adds to our stress.

In the old cartoon series, Calvin and Hobbes are standing outside, awestruck, staring at the stars. Calvin responds as many youngsters might. He says, "The universe just goes out forever and ever!"

To which Hobbes (his stuffed tiger-friend) says, "It kind of makes you wonder why Man considers himself such a big screaming deal!"

The last panel shows Calvin and Hobbes indoors, TV on, telephone ringing, and the stereo blaring. Calvin says, "That's why we stay inside with our appliances!" (1)

Maybe we have that kind of attitude toward the great questions of life. Turn up the TV and not think about it. Still, all of us face questions of loss and suffering and despair. Sooner or later, all of us are confronted with the specter of heartache. Job helps us confront our situation head-on.

Job's trials were so sudden, so senseless, so severe. They recall that fateful day on September 11, 2001, when thousands of innocent people headed to work one day and never came home. Hear the story of Job as reflected in the words of some of the survivors of September 11th:

Reader

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. (Job 1:1)

On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And the LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" (2:1)

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going

back and forth in it." (2:2)

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." (2:3)

"Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." (2:4, 5)

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life." (2:6)

Male 1

"***I was just getting out of the elevator. I was in a very good mood that day. Just looking forward to going to work. And as soon as I turned the corner, I just heard an explosion, and I was engulfed in fire. I mean, that's basically how it started."*** (2)

Female 1

(reading from a telephone log or notebook)

From the 911 logs on Sept. 11th, 2001 in New York City:

8:48 a.m.—a plane crashes into top of 1 World Trade Center

8:53 a.m.—male caller states someone fell out of building

9:07 a.m.—female caller states she is pregnant–floor 103–30 people, lots of smoke

9:09 a.m.—male caller states 2 World Trade Center–people are jumping out the side of a large hole–no one catching them

9:12 a.m.—male caller states on 106 floor about 100 people in room–need directions on how to stay alive

9:36 a.m.—female caller states very hot door–states she is going to die–still on phone–wants to call mother

10:00 a.m.—2 World Trade Center has collapsed—all calls disconnected

10:29 a.m.—1 World Trade Center entire tower down–all calls disconnected (2)

Female 2

"Their first reaction is disbelief. People think, 'Not to my loved one. There must be some mistake." (3)

Male 2

"I was in the second tower when the aircraft struck the first. Me and my colleagues all were shocked . . . . When word came around to evacuate the second tower, there was panic. People jammed the stairwells and the elevators were all over capacity. We got out and just ran like there was no tomorrow." (4)

Reader

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger

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came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1: 13-17)

Female 2

"The second reaction is numbing, when they just shut down." (5)

Male 1

"I wake up, and I find myself in the pitch darkness in my house and envisioning that final blast before I got out of the building. I see that wave of black smoke coming at me." (6)

Male 2

"I was playing chess with a friend in the park when the plane hit . . . then the second one rocketed into the building . . . people running and screaming. It's at moments like these that you feel the most helpless, the most human." (7)

Female 1

"Everyone I know is walking around stunned, numbed, and in a state of total shock." (8)

Reader

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1: 18-19)

Female 1

"I'm crying in my heart. My heart will never, ever be the same. This was a man who was my best friend. He was my husband and the father of my children. I see him every day in their faces. And their faces are in anguish right now. I must take care of them. And then I'll take care of me." (9)

Female 3

"Even though it's a reality and I understand it, it's still not real to me, because there was no body. There wasn't a sickness. He wasn't hit by a car . . . Even though I know that it is true, it still doesn't seem real. And having to deal with a death certificate makes it so real." (10)

Reader

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. (2:7, 8)

Female 2

"The third reaction is intense anger, and finally, after time, is resolution, when people find a way to make sense of the tragedy." (11)

Male 1

"So many dead. So much suffering. So unnecessary. I will never get past this as long as I live. And one of the most powerful things I will never forget is walking past firefighters who were walking up the stairs as I was walking down." (12)

Male 2

"May the Lord have mercy on the souls of those who lost their lives

in this catastrophe." (13)

Reader

(Job's) wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (2:9)

He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. (2:9-10)

Song for silent meditation: "Hurt" by Johnny Cash or "The Day is Dawning"

So, here is a man who had it all--health, wealth, family, friends--all the things that most people treasure, and yet he lost it all. Can you relate to that? His wife asks, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he does hold on to his integrity--and he holds on to his faith in God. How did he do it? We pick up the story next week, but it is a story we see time and time again. The person who trusts in God experiences great heartache but, somehow, he or she comes through that heartache with more faith and not less.

Jane Needham in her book, *Looking Up,* tells about her own Job-like experience. She lay in a hospital bed as her doctor said to her, "Jane, nobody knows what's ahead for you. Maybe a wheelchair, maybe not, but you have to face this fact, Jane. From now on, all you'll have is the crumbs of life--crumbs, and your three wonderful children. That's your deal. But," the doctor said, "it will be easier being brave and you'll inspire others."

How would you like to hear that from your doctor? Eventually Jane ended up in an iron lung. One day she overheard a little child ask her mother as the two walked down the corridor of the hospital, "Will she ever get out of that thing?" The mother answered, "Never, dear. Never in this world." When Jane heard that, she said she finally accepted her condition. "I lay there accepting paralysis for the rest of my life and offering it up to God." The consequence? Jane became the most radiant person imaginable, inspiring others through her

life and her writings. (14)

I confess to you. I don't know how people do it, but by the grace of God they do. In suffering, they find God. Maybe as we study the book of Job together over these next four weeks we will find the answer to how that happens.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Protestant pastor who was imprisoned and eventually executed by the Nazis during World War II. From his bleak prison cell, Bonhoeffer wrote letters full of faith and hope. This is a quote from one letter to his sister: "I think that God is nearer to suffering than to happiness, and to find God in this way gives peace and rest and a strong and courageous heart." (15)

Curse God and die? No. Trust God and live! That is the testimony of thousands of people through the ages who have experienced the trials of Job. Trust God and live.

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1. "Funny Pages Serve Up Spiritual Food for Thought," Tom Schaefer, *Kingsport Times-News*, April 30, 1995, p. 5E.
2. "A Survivor Speaks," interview by Bryant Gumbel with survivor Manu Dhingra, The Early Show, CBS, Oct. 3, 2001, transcript on CBS website.
3. *NewYorkSeptemberElevenTwoThousandOne*, a de.MO project (Rhode Island: Meridian Printing, 2001).
4. Abbie McGreavey, Red Cross mental health counselor, "Horror of Attack Takes Emotional Toll on Nation," by Cynthia Long, RedCross.org, Sept. 12, 2001.
5. Mac Delaney, USA, quoted in "US under attack" *Talking Point* from BBC News website, 11 September, 2001.
6. McGreavey.
7. Arthur Del Bianco, engineer at the World Trade Center, "The Long Road Back," report by Tracy Smith, The Early Show, CBS, Sept. 28, 2001, transcript on CBS website.
8. Steven, USA, quoted in "US under attack" *Talking Point* from BBC News website, 11 September, 2001.
9. I. Baldizon, USA, quoted in "US under attack" *Talking Point* from BBC News

website, 11 September, 2001.
10. Barbara Minervino, who lost her husband, Louis, in the attacks, "And Life Moves On . . . " reported by Julie Chen, The Early Show, CBS, Oct. 11, 2001. Transcripts from CBS website.
11. Patricia Spataro, whose husband, John, died in the attacks, "The Long Road Back," report by Tracy Smith, The Early Show, CBS, Sept. 28, 2001, transcript on CBS website.
12. McGreavey.
13. Brendan MacWade, USA, quoted in "US under attack" *Talking Point* from BBC News website, 11 September, 2001.
14. Terry McClenahan, SoHo, New York City, USA, quoted in "US under attack" *Talking Point* from BBC News website, 11 September, 2001.
15. "In Their Own Words" By Col. William Francis, *The Asbury Herald,* Volume 112, No. 2 & 3, pp. 10-11.

BATES, DALE L., age 54, of Sylvan Springs, went home to be with Jesus as diagnosed with cancer, October 5, 2003. He was an employee of U. S. Steel, Pipe Division. He was a member of Bethel Church of Birmingham, AL. He is survived by his loving family, Jerry W. Wolfe, Mary L. Schaefer of Sylvan Springs, and Bill Wolfe of Birmingham, Brenda Self of Springville, Melissa Boartfield of Midfield, Becky Harris of Blountsville, half brothers, George Bates of Birmingham, O. Monroe Bates of Susan Moore; half sisters, Evelyn Miller of Cincinnati, OH, Marie Martin of Hayden; loving nieces and nephews and great nieces and nephews, and special and dearest friends, Elleann and Butch Tatum, Susan Hinds, Shirley Lambert, Nancy Underwood, Denise Knight, Eddie Simmons, Robbie Goolsby, Tony E. Haynes, and many others. Visitation will be held at Peoples Funeral Home in Hueytown, AL on Tuesday, October 7, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Celebration of Life on Wednesday, October 8, at 2 p.m. at Peoples Memorial Chapel in Hueytown, AL. Services to be performed by Rev. Marge Ragona and Susan Mims; also three special singers. Special thanks to New Beacon Hospice. Burial to be held at Forest Grove Cemetery in Pleasant Grove, AL. Peoples Chapel Funeral Home directing.